Ruk Sindhi: Trade Relations Between the Indus Civilization and Oman (Magan)

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Five thousand years ago, the three great ancient civilizations — the Indus Valley, Egypt, and Mesopotamia (Sumer) — maintained trade relations with one another. Evidence from ancient Mesopotamian archaeological sites, particularly Sumerian inscriptions, mentions three major foreign trade centers of that era: **Magan, Dilmun, and Meluhha.** Traders from these regions would either travel to Mesopotamia for commerce or establish trading colonies to reside there.

Modern archaeological research strongly supports the conclusion that the inhabitants of Meluhha were traders associated with the Indus Valley Civilization. (1) (2) Likewise, the traders of Dilmun are now linked with present-day Bahrain. (3) (4) The land referred to as Magan in Sumerian inscriptions corresponds to the region of modern Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

Magan is first mentioned in Sumerian texts during a period when the **Umm al-Nar Civilization (2600–2000 BCE)** flourished in what is now Oman and the UAE. In these writings, Magan is particularly noted for its **shipbuilding and maritime expertise.** The Sumerian king **Sargon (2371–2316 BCE)** proudly states that ships from **Dilmun, Magan, and Meluhha** arrived at the ports of his kingdom. His successor, **Naram-Sin**, later conquered Magan. During this period, trade between the Sumerians and the Indus Valley Civilization was conducted through Magan. (5)

Archaeologists assert that the people of the Indus Valley Civilization conducted trade with Oman and other Arab regions via the **Persian Gulf maritime routes.** (6) (7)

According to the renowned archaeologist **Dennys Frenez**, excavations at ancient sites in Oman have uncovered large storage jars, painted pottery, and carnelian beads linked to the Indus Valley. Items crafted from elephant ivory and metal tools — clearly originating from the Indus region — have also been found. Seals from the Indus Valley, along with cubical stone

weights used for trade, have been discovered at Omani sites. Among the most significant finds are **pedestal dishes** used for presenting food during special ceremonies. These dishes are adorned with intricate painted designs. (8)

A recent research project conducted at a center in Muscat has yielded additional evidence of connections between the ancient peoples of Oman (Magan) and the Indus Valley Civilization. (9) Near the city of Sohar, at the ancient site of **Dahwa**, dating to the Umm al-Nar period, archaeologists have uncovered an Indus-style seal and remains of pottery decorated in red and black paint.

The Rector of a German university, **Professor Dr. Michael Jansen**, has described this evidence as highly significant for understanding the relationship between the people of Magan and the Indus Valley. In December 2017, the media cell of **Sultan Qaboos University** publicly announced that cultural and civilizational links between Oman and Sindh (in present-day Pakistan) had been firmly established. (10)

The ancient site of **Dahwa** is associated with the **Umm al-Nar Civilization**, which flourished between **2500 and 2000 BCE**. This civilization extended across what is now the territory of Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Dahwa, located in the northern part of the Al-Batinah plain, is considered the oldest known settlement in the region that maintained trade relations with the Indus Civilization.

Excavations at Dahwa were conducted between **2013 and 2017** by a joint team of experts from the **University of Bologna (Italy)** and the **University of Wisconsin (USA)**. Among the discoveries at this site were pottery vessels, large storage jars, cooking equipment, and containers for storing grains and flour — all of which bear strong resemblance to artifacts found in the core regions of the Indus Valley Civilization, particularly in Sindh.

Archaeologists also uncovered stone hearths (stoves) used for baking bread, beads used for ornaments, nose rings, and other jewelry brought by traders from the Indus Valley. According to a statement from Sultan Qaboos University, these items were manufactured in Sindh — especially in the region of Mohenjo Daro — and transported to Oman for trade.

Experts believe that these goods were transported from the Indus region by small boats that traveled along the **Indus River** to the coastal areas of Sindh. From there, the items were loaded onto larger vessels that sailed to the port of **Sham Wilayat** on the Omani coast. The cargo was then transported inland along the **Hajar Mountain route** for approximately 24 kilometers to reach Dahwa.

Archaeologists are still uncertain about the specific contents once stored in the large vessels and jars recovered at Dahwa. However, it is known that during the Umm al-Nar period, Oman was renowned for exporting **copper** to Sindh, Mesopotamia, and Iran. (11) (12)

On **24 April 2018**, the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center, in collaboration with the **Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.**, organized a symposium on the ancient civilization and culture of Oman. Archaeologists at the event presented detailed insights into the connections between the Indus Valley Civilization and ancient Oman.

Kimberly D. Williams, Associate Professor of Anthropology at **Temple University**, stated that there is solid and compelling evidence of regional interaction between the peoples of the Indus Valley and Magan between **2700 and 2000 BCE**. She noted that copper was the primary commodity of exchange between the two civilizations.

Archaeological discoveries at Dahwa have revealed vessels manufactured by the people of the Indus Civilization. Similarly, **Ellie Dolarhyde** of the Department of Anthropology at **New York University** presented findings showing that by **3000 BCE**, strong trade networks connected the Sumerians, ancient Iran, the Indus Civilization, and southeastern Arabia.

Mark Kenoyer, a distinguished professor of anthropology at the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, has also concluded that Bronze Age Oman possessed advanced technology and maintained extensive trade connections. Large quantities of pottery, stone vessels, stone sculptures, and copper artifacts found in the region signal economic and cultural exchange with neighboring civilizations. (13) (14)

After Dahwa, another important ancient site in Oman is located in the region of **Ibri**, specifically in the areas of **Al-Khutm** and **Al-Ayan**. These sites contain tombs dating back to around **3000 BCE**. Archaeologists have discovered graves from that period, including one burial in which a **sword and dagger made of iron and steel** were found alongside the deceased. Modern research confirms that the use of iron and steel during that era was already known in the **Indus Valley**.

Speaking to the *Times of Oman*, **Sultan bin Saif al-Bakri**, Director of Archaeology and Culture in Oman, stated that the artifacts unearthed from these ancient sites prove that the culture of Oman at that time was influenced by the Indus Valley Civilization. (15) A particularly striking feature of one burial is that **male and female camels** were sacrificed and buried with the deceased as part of a post-mortem ritual. (16) (17)

At the coastal site of **Ras al-Hadd**, cooking vessels linked to the Indus Civilization have also been discovered. Similar pottery has been found at two other prehistoric sites situated further inland at **Salut** and **Bat**. These finds indicate that traders from the Indus Valley were not only active in Oman's coastal settlements but also transported their goods deep into the country's interior. (18)

At **Ras al-Jinz**, archaeologists uncovered a **square-shaped seal** from the Indus Civilization. The seal bears an image of the famous one-horned bull along with examples of Indus script. (19) In another inland site, **Bisyah**, a burial yielded a small Indus-style seal engraved with a large-horned bull.

Among the Indus artifacts found in Oman's ancient settlements and cemeteries, jewelry made from **carnelian beads** is particularly notable. The people of ancient Oman wore jewelry imported from the Indus Valley with great pride, and such ornaments were buried with them after death. Excavations at the ancient cemeteries of **Bat** and **Adam** have unearthed many of these beads.

In the Indus Valley, artisans crafted a wide range of ornaments, decorative items, and gaming pieces from **elephant ivory.** Similar ivory ornaments and game pieces have been recovered from ancient sites in Oman, indicating they were transported there by Indus traders. Children's toys from the Indus region — especially terracotta figurines of birds — were also sent to Oman.

Traders from the Indus used weights and balances of various sizes to measure goods in Oman. These standardized weights, characteristic of the Indus Valley Civilization, have been found in graves at **Tell Abraq** and **Shimal**.

The discovery of such extensive evidence of trade between ancient Oman (Magan) and the Indus Valley Civilization demonstrates that the peoples of the Indus did not confine themselves to local exchange. During the height of their civilization, they began trading with neighboring regions as well. Their merchants navigated long maritime routes to reach foreign markets, where they sold their manufactured goods.

Jewelry, seals, pottery, carnelian bead necklaces, and other items produced in major urban centers — such as **Mohenjo Daro, Harappa, Chanhudaro, Kot Diji, Lothal, Kalibangan, Rakhi Garhi**, and others — were exported via ships and boats to nearby civilizations, including **Mesopotamia (Iraq), Egypt, Bahrain, and Oman**.

The traders of the Indus Valley not only traded with these nearby Arab regions and Egypt, but also established **commercial residences and trading colonies** there.

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